State of the Web

Two years ago, NC DHHS embarked on a project to improve its web presence, making it more professional and more useful. Until then, the department's massive web presence of 124 websites was practically unmanaged and quickly becoming unmanageable. The effort involves improving existing sites, and creating a comprehensive redesign site that meets the needs of all divisions. Underlying the project is the belief that the web is a place where site visitors should be able to get things done, efficiently and with ease. This second annual "State of the Web" report provides an overview of achievements last year, and what is on the horizon.

Traffic to navigation pages for residents has tripled or more in 2007, while traffic to the DHHS home page has increased by 50 percent.

The new Government page is the second most popular link from the DHHS home page. The most popular is Divisions and Offices.

Accomplished in 2007

➢ **Search Engine**: DHHS's numerous websites are now unified by a single search engine. This gives lost site visitors an escape valve. For instance, if they go to the Medical Assistance website looking for immunizations, they can search and find the correct web page in Public Health.

➢ **Web Governance—Documents:** A Website Policy, Web Standards, and a Website Style Guide were written. These detailed and useful guidance documents will help us manage our websites more consistently and professionally, and guide the department as we move to a comprehensive site that encompasses all of our programs.

➢ **Web Governance—Content Managers:** Web Content Managers for each division and office are now in place. The Content Manager is the liaison with Public Affairs for the Website Redesign Project, the division director's go-to person for the web, and the person who can provide direction to those who handle website content.

➢ **Web Governance—Content Review**: Consistent review procedures including the content manager and the public information officer are provided in the Website Style Guide.

➢ **Web Pages for Residents Triple in Traffic:** Cross-department content teams collaborated on navigation pages for residents, creating content rich in services information, community advocacy opportunities and hotlines. As a result, the number of site visitors to these pages has tripled or more.

➢ **New Web Pages for Government, Partners and Providers, and Facts and Figures**. Content teams from all divisions found the most useful information for these audiences. For the first time, we are serving local agencies, the regulated community, and researchers on the web.

➢ **More New Content:** More and better coordinated contact information is now available. A site map lays out the organization of the site.

➢ **Design and Usability, Rounds Two and Three:** A design is 80 percent complete. Usability tests on each round ensure we find a design that is easy to use.

Next Steps:

➢ **Design and Templates**: The design will be completed and translated into highly accessible, standards-based templates. The new design and templates will make it easy for site visitors to print pages from the website, to find similar content presented in predictable ways, for low vision users to increase font sizes or contrast, for users with a screen reader to have direct routes to information, and for those who navigate with a keyboard to efficiently tab through the pages.

➢ **Interim Improvements, Continued**: With the new Web Standards and Web Style Guide, webmasters across the department are working to comply. They are working on consistent department branding, with a high quality DHHS logo, better division identification, deeper saturation of the search tool, and more consistent and informative title tags for better searching. They will also be encouraged to validate their website code.

➢ **Search Engine Optimization**: DHHS can do a better job of making its complex and multiple websites optimized for commercial search engines, such as Google. Strategies include submitting detailed site maps to search engines and improving behind the scenes "metadata," including page titles. These actions will go far to increasing site traffic and ensuring that the searching public finds valuable pages buried deep in our websites.

➢ **Accessibility**: A cross-department workgroup is meeting to understand the complex resource, training, and staff requirements to provide accessible PDF documents on the web. Tips and best practices will be written. Department management will be provided with resource and training recommendations needed for DHHS to meet accessibility standards.

➢ **Web Governance, Step Two**: The new guidance documents and the appointment of the Web Content Managers provide the foundation for the department to better govern its massive web presence. Step two will be for each office to name Web Content Coordinators, as needed. Web Content Coordinators are the people in the sections and branches who are closer to the content than the Web Content Manager.

➢ **Certification**: We'll work with the division Web Content Managers and the new Web Content Coordinators to create a process to "certify" all departmental websites to ensure that the information on our websites is current and appropriate.

➢ **Division Incorporation**: Divisions will receive writer training and training in Dreamweaver templates before they are incorporated into the redesign site.

The Comprehensive Website Redesign Project sponsor is DHHS Senior Advisor, Linda Povlich. The project director is Lois Nilsen, Office of Public Affairs. For website guidance documents and project updates, go to: ncdhhs.gov/redesignproject

"Writing for the Web is not the same as writing for print. One of the key differences is that, when people use the Web, they are relentlessly task-focused. They want to do something, and they want to do it as quickly and as painlessly as possible." Gerry McGovern, web guru, author, consultant to Rolls-Royce, Microsoft, the BBC, and USA.GOV

A Web Content Management System will revolutionize the way we manage the web. This ambitious project will require resources and staff. These will be requested in the 2009 budget for the department.